

May 16, 2003

The Honorable Greg Nickels
Mayor, City of Seattle
Municipal Building
600 Fourth Avenue, #1200
Seattle, WA 98104

The Honorable Jim Compton
The Honorable Richard Conlin
The Honorable Jan Drago
The Honorable Nick Licata
The Honorable Richard McIver
The Honorable Judy Nicaastro
The Honorable Margaret Pageler
The Honorable Peter Steinbrueck
The Honorable Heidi Wills
Seattle City Council
Municipal Building
600 Fourth Avenue, #1100
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Mayor Nickels and Councilmembers Compton, Conlin, Drago, Licata, McIver, Nicaastro, Pageler, Steinbrueck, Wills:

The following City of Seattle proposals for the Northgate Urban Center are evidence of the collaborative efforts between the agencies to work towards achieving the goals of the Northgate Comprehensive Plan. I would like to take this opportunity to express my support for these efforts to move forward with redevelopment within the Northgate Urban Center and to provide King County's observations and perspectives.

King County Transit Oriented Development (TOD) – The primary goal for the County TOD project is the integration of the bus transit center and future light rail station at Northgate together with high density, mixed-use urban development on the western half of the “super block” south of the mall. Transit oriented development will increase transit ridership and help the City of Seattle achieve its Northgate Area Comprehensive Plan goals and the City's growth management targets. For example, the 312 to 575 housing units in the alternative TOD design concepts would provide between 10% to 20% of the city's 2014 housing target for this urban center.

In March 2003, two alternative TOD design concepts were presented to the public and to agencies for review and comment. A third design will be prepared later this year. Funding required to complete the entire public portion of the project is included in the Regional Transportation Improvement District (RTID) proposal. I support the language in Section 6.3 of the Northgate Mall Development Agreement that encourages development that supports TOD and prohibits land uses that are not compatible. I also support language that anticipates that the future owner of the six acres east of the County's project site will work with the community and others to pursue comprehensive approaches to transportation investments, storm water management, and site design issues including open space and pedestrian connections.

Sustainable Development – King County is investigating the feasibility of design features like a “green roof” for the proposed cinema which could be an innovative stormwater improvement that would benefit Thornton Creek. The County is also looking at making LEEDS certification a part of a TOD developer solicitation.

5th Avenue Street Improvements – The City and County have been successful in their efforts to acquire federal Congestion Management and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds for 5th Avenue pedestrian and south lot area transit improvements as well as transportation demand management (TDM) activities. The King County Council has approved funding for the local match for the CMAQ 5th Avenue grant. King County looks forward to coordinating these projects with the Seattle Department of Transportation.

Northgate Overlay Code Amendments – I support repeal of the General Development Plan (GDP) requirement of the Northgate District Overlay code. I do not intend to proceed with the proposed TOD project if it is subject to this code requirement. The GDP requirement creates substantial uncertainty and inflexibility that will cause delay and increase costs that will deter developer participation in the TOD project. The County will meet or exceed the public outreach, procedural and substantive requirements of the Seattle Municipal Code including the Master Use Permit, SEPA and design review.

Design Guidelines – The proposed Northgate neighborhood design guidelines may not work for the County's TOD project. For example, one of the TOD design alternatives is based on an eight acre parking structure with private development on top with the public plaza at the level of 3rd Avenue NE. The guidelines need to be revised to directly address unique, large scale projects like the TOD. The County looks forward to reviewing and commenting on the forthcoming draft of the proposed design guidelines.

Coordinated Transportation Improvement Plan (CTIP) – I agree with the Maple Leaf Community Council that updating the Northgate transportation plan is needed. The County TOD concepts include alternatives for the bus transit center, off-street bus layover, park-and-ride with 1,400 stalls, and a light rail station. Other important issues to address are improving the ability of buses to move through the urban center and the potential location of a future monorail station within easy walking distance of bus and light rail. The County supports and is interested in learning the details about our participation in the proposal to create a CTIP for the Northgate Urban Center.

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) CIP Amendments – I support cost effective regional water quality and detention facilities that benefit Thornton Creek. I am interested in the City's proposal for a regional stormwater facility assuming costs would be equivalent or less than onsite facility costs. I would like to explore the issues further as more detailed planning and engineering work is done. The County would be willing to pay its share of the proposed regional facility to serve its eight-acre site subject to future agreements that would provide acceptable levels of certainty on issues such as costs and regulatory compliance, and also voter approval of the Regional Transportation Improvement District's proposal.

Conversion of the 5th/112th Park-and-Ride to a City Park – On March 14, 2003, the King County Council approved the motion (copy enclosed) supporting transfer to the City at market value when replacement park-and-ride parking is available.

Northgate Library, Community Center and Park – King County supports these projects as important investments for the Northgate community. The County will work with the City on coordination of these investments, the CTIP, and the 5th Avenue street improvements.

Affordable Housing Tax Abatement – King County supports the proposal of the City of Seattle Office of Housing to include Northgate as a geographic target area for the City's Property Tax Exemption for Multifamily Housing Program. The County would like this incentive to be available when it issues its TOD developer solicitation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these proposals to implement the Northgate Comprehensive Plan. I look forward to the County's continued collaboration with the City to finalize and implement these proposals.

If you have any questions, please contact Henry S. Markus, AICP, our Northgate TOD Project Manager, at 206-684-6738. Copies of the County's Northgate TOD handouts and design drawings are available online at: <http://www.metrokc.gov/kcdot/alts/tod/northgate.htm>

Sincerely,

Ron Sims
King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers
Harold Taniguchi, Director, King County Department of Transportation (KCDOT)
Ron Posthuma, Assistant Director, KCDOT
Henry S. Markus, AICP, Northgate TOD Project Manager, KCDOT